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It is a little over a mile from the west gate to the centre of Bida where the four main roads meet. Here stands another royal residence, the house of *Etsu* Usman Zaki—to-day almost in ruins. But the ruins, the enormous lay-out, the faded paintings and decorations, still speak of the ancient greatness. It is only ten years since the last ruler from this house, *Etsu* Bello, died. But ten years in this country, ten years with no royal household, no army of servants and slaves to take care of upkeep and repair, have sufficed to turn the king's palace into a desolate, half-deserted ruin in a corner of which the king's last descendants find ample room. Behind the house of Usman Zaki is the big town mosque where the Friday services are held, a building of red clay, with a tin roof perched on top, bare and singularly unattractive. In front, and all along the north wall of the royal residence, filling the wide open square, stretches the big 'night-market'—the centre of Bida's pulsating life. It starts in the late afternoon, when peasants return from the farms, craftsmen stop work, and the women leave the houses, dressed for the occasion. Soon the large square is packed with people: men, women, children; townspeople and villagers, buyers and sellers, and those who come to the evening market to watch the crowds, meet friends, or to enjoy the excitement that goes with such public gatherings. The market is easy to survey. Every important commodity has its proper place. Horses and live stock, saddlery and fine coloured grass mats are sold behind the mosque; leather work, caps and straw hats, timber for roofing and coarse mats, in front of *Etsu* Usman's house. The butchers have a hut of their own, and so have the barbers, while traders and brokers who deal in cloth, gowns, ornaments, and swords occupy the long rows of booths which form the one rigid structure in this moving, seething multitude. Women are sitting in long rows all along the street, so close to each other that you can hardly move, selling food, native soap, kola-nuts, ornaments, silver bangles and glassware, beads and European cloth—anything that can be bought and sold in West Africa. Sometimes there are drummers, or a group of girls will sing and dance somewhere in the crowd; the 'young men about town' walk up and down the street, shouting greetings to friends, and joking with girls. When it becomes dark the big trade ends; only the women continue their trade in the light of little clay lamps which they place in front of them—a truly enchanting illumination.

But then, in the dark of the night, the market changes its face: the respectable meeting-place of buyers and sellers becomes a market of Venus Pandemos. The women who remain so late are not dressed for work or trade: they wear their most beautiful dresses, light-coloured and embroidered cloth; they have bangles on their wrists and rings on their fingers; their eyes are painted with antimony, and their fingers and hands stained with henna. They never carry loads themselves—they always have a small girl with them to carry their baskets and bundles. They all sell kola-nuts—a man's article. They are always surrounded by men with whom they gossip and joke, and then, a whispered appointment, one of the men leaves, followed after a while by his companion for the night. One light after the other is extinguished. The market grows

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dark and quiet. After 9 o'clock the market-place and the streets are almost deserted.

But let us return to our daylight inspection of the town: we were standing at the crossing of the four main streets of Bida. Turn to the north, and you come to *ldlemi*, the strangers' quarter of Bida, where Hausa and Yoruba are living in houses and huts built in their own tribal style and fashion. They are traders by profession, and shops and stalls line the long road to the north gate—shops in which you can buy everything at every hour of the day, from native food to a European wrist-watch, from the powders and amulets of the Hausa medicine-man to brass buttons or bicycle spare parts offered for sale in a Yoruba man's shop. The road to the east bridges a stream and a stretch of marsh-land that runs across the town, with its fields of rice and sugar-cane; it runs past another quarter of brass-smiths, skirts the quarter of the *masagá*, the Bida glass-makers, and leaves the town by the Badeggi gate, so called after a village thirteen miles from Bida on the small rickety railway line (the oldest railway line in Nigeria) which links Baro on the Niger with Minna on the main line of the Nigerian Railway. The south road crosses another stream, with yellowish, dirty water in which children are bathing, grooms watering horses, and women washing their clothes and cleaning pots and pans. It runs on through a thickly populated part of the town, past a beautiful old mosque perched precariously on the edge of a deep trench; another day-market, and another royal residence. Another weavers' quarter, and another group of blacksmiths. Old Bida and New Bida mix for a while: still inside the town walls are Prison and Hospital; on the other side the Native Administration Workshops and the Middle School. And beyond this, the European Reservation, the Government Offices, and then open fields and farms.

This, then, is Bida. Like all large towns it is both more and less than one community. More, in that contacts, communications, and forms of intercourse stretch far beyond the town boundaries; and less, in that within the town walls of Bida there exists a vast number of different, almost independent, strata and 'areas of common life'. Some, perhaps the weakest and least tenacious, are defined by tribal origin. The social differentiation of rich and poor, of social status and political rank, create others—strata in which life is lived in different fashion, in which different values are valid and different patterns of behaviour accepted as normal. But we have also observed the division of the town into three large districts, almost exact copies of each other, each with its day-market, its quarter of craftsmen, and its royal residence. The three districts are separated, geographically, by the two streams which run through Bida, and they are spoken of as three *ekpā*, 'banks', and given the name of the royal house that stands on their ground. Here we deal with units of a different order: they represent political factions, organizations of partisanship and patronage, which cut across the other social, cultural, and tribal strata. They reflect specific political and economic interests, they are vested, ultimately, in that paramount political organization, the state. But that we shall understand more clearly as this description proceeds.

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In the houses of the higher as well as of lesser nobility I found
595 the practice of divorcing ageing wives and replacing them with more
565 attractive girls. The ex-wife, especially if she had borne children, would
586 be allowed to stay on in the house and would continue to be supported by the husband, or ex-husband—a wife on pension, as it were. The late *Etsu* of Agaie was partial to a different method: he used to marry off his 'pensioned' wives, at very low bride-price, to *talakaži* and peasants, who were either glad to find a 'cheap' wife or else afraid to refuse so exalted a gift. Among the upper classes of Bida old men, long past marrying
[832] age, would still add young girls to the number of their 'wives'. Aphrodisiacs (which one can buy from the barber-doctors in Bida) and stimulants (above all, kola-nuts) keep alive their sexual appetite. Old S., who died in 1935, 70 years old, had married a new young wife only the previous year, and a son was born to him ('to him' at least in the legal sense) posthumously.

595 This classbound polygamy deeply affects the sex morality of the
837 women and, indirectly, of the society at large. Respect for chastity and
831 the sanctity of matrimonial ties dominates the traditional moral concepts of Nupe. But this 'double morality' of a social system which legitimizes unrestricted sexual desire of the men in one privileged stratum, but would force similar desires in other strata into the realm of illegitimate and indictable action, is in danger of defeating itself. In Bida it has clearly provided a strong stimulus to extra-marital sex relations in all classes. Moreover, the starved sexuality of the women in the large polygamous households strives to find an outlet.[1] The insecurity of their legal position tends to remove the barriers of conventional matrimonial morality. Thus many of the younger wives or concubines seek satisfaction in illegitimate relationships and even semi-professional prostitution.

548 Adultery, including adultery in this extreme form of semi-profes-
837 sional prostitution, is extremely widespread among women of every status. Prostitution in the strict sense (practised as a profession and in brothels) does not occur in Bida. But we have heard that the kola-nut vendors on Bida night-market, all married women, are prostitutes at the same time.[2] We shall learn later of the close association between women's trade and prostitution (and the large majority of Bida women are traders of one kind or another). 'Every woman', an informant told me, 'whom you see beautifully dressed in the streets of Bida after dark, is a "bad" woman.' Informants, themselves married men, were all agreed that there were hardly any 'good' women left in Bida. But when I asked them what the husbands were doing about this they said: 'Nothing; what could we do?' Indeed, they can do little but shut their eyes. The
837 obvious alternative, divorce, is impossible in most cases. Poor men
586 cannot afford to divorce their wives, for this would mean forfeiting part
565 of the bride-price and thus their only chance of finding another wife; moreover, the economic dependence of many husbands on their wives (of which we shall hear more in a later chapter) forbids such a course.

[838] [1] In the royal 'harems' homosexual practices—called *madigo* or *lutu* (the Arabic word for homosexuality)—are, in fact, said to occur.

[2] Their 'tariff' is commonly known: it varies between 6*d*. and 1*s*.

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disposing of their goods—the peasant woman who walks eight to ten miles to the nearest local market, and the professional woman trader who travels to Lokoja or Ilorin by canoe or train—may seem but an external feature. Yet this factor of distance possesses a deeper significance. The essential difference between the professional and the occasional woman trader is embodied in the extent to which their trading and marketing becomes an independent, self-contained, and self-centred enterprise. Both the occasional and the professional trader are out for profit. But only the latter has adjusted her life fully to this aim. 'Proper' trade necessitates a freedom of movement, a full-time devotion to the task, which only women who have made themselves independent can afford. It means extensive journeys, and long absence from home. Obviously, the wife of a farmer or craftsman who must look after the house is less able to do this than the wife of a trader or a man of the leisured classes.

But the profession demands even more than comparative leisure. The long absence from home, the life on the road, in foreign villages and countries to which none of the normal contacts of the community stretch, means ultimately a dissolution of the bonds of marriage, household, and family. The disappearance of all moral control of the husband over his wife, or the local community over its women, expresses itself in the sexual licence claimed by these women. Female trade and immorality are in Nupe conception two things closely related. The women traders who go on these long expeditions and stay away from home for weeks, months, or even years, are commonly regarded as 'loose' women, as women who cannot help leading a 'loose' and 'immoral' life. The women traders prostitute themselves for money in the villages and towns where they stop on their trading expeditions. The money which they make is regarded by the people as legitimate a form of earnings as that gained from trade itself. When they return to their homes husband and family will receive them without question, and no blame would attach to them for the life which they had been leading while away. Public opinion, though outspoken in its general condemnation of moral laxity, yet countenances the sexual licence of women traders and accepts it almost as an institution. If people—men, as the spokesmen of public opinion—express their indignation at this danger to matrimonial morality, they attack, not the practice itself, but its disproportionate growth in recent times.

We have, in a previous chapter, discussed the social significance of this qualified admission of sexual licence in a certain limited social domain (see Chap. IX). Let me recall the salient facts: female trade, closely associated as it is with licentious living, provided the scope for that socially condoned sexual licence which other social forces seem to have made necessary. Thus female trade became in some respects a closed profession, the entrance into which was made dependent on the qualification of sterility. We may add here that, not unnaturally, women who were past child-bearing age could also legitimately join the profession of women traders. By means of these two qualifications an occupation which harboured some danger to common morality was limited to

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what were (to the society) the least dangerous groups. This limitation is no longer true. But the information which I collected on this point, from every part of the country, and every social stratum, leaves no doubt that the limitation did obtain, and that it is still regarded as the more adequate practice. Formerly, I was told, no peasant would have dreamed of letting his young wife go to distant markets the journey to which would involve spending the night on the road, away from home. Nor did women with children ever leave the home for these long expeditions to foreign parts. To-day, an ever-increasing number of Nupe women, young women and women with children, travel about the country, independent, and unrestricted by village morals. In the large trading-places in the south such as Baro, Lokoja, Ibadan, I have met many—they lived there, some with their children, as well-known traders and as equally well-known prostitutes.

We have learned that this development is due to a variety of social factors. We will discuss here the factors which are embodied in the economic changes, and which, in fact, appear to represent the main moving force. It is difficult to say for certain whether the floating population of wifeless men has considerably increased during the last generation. It seems to have done so. But speaking more generally, the rapid development of trade since the pacification of the country after the Fulani wars and specially after the British conquest cannot be doubted. It appears to have overtaken Nupe society unawares, as it were, without giving it the chance to readjust itself gradually to the new conditions. Trade, in the war-disturbed times of the past an occupation for men who could carry arms, fell now easily to the women. It called for new recruits, and seized upon the existing system of division of labour between the sexes—men as producers, and women as 'middlemen' and traders. Yet this organization, which was designed to fit into the narrow scope of village life, was adapted too readily to the purposes of the new widespread trade that developed in the Emirates. No other system of division of labour and specialization, it appears, could be evolved as quickly to take charge of the new tasks. It could not but disorganize social life. Family organization and the traditional concepts of morality fell victims to economic progress. The profit motive, here as in many other fields of Nupe economy, outstripped and overruled the interests of group cohesion and group stability.